

HISTORY OF THE BROTHERHOOD OF ROOKS

(As remembered by Bradley Skeele (1970) and summarized by Lyman Markel)

The History of The Brotherhood of Rooks has unfortunately been neglected, and records, carefully kept for years, have disappeared. Evidently, the early Rooks did not recognize the importance of small events as interesting history until long after the events happened. Today, only a few of the Rooks have memory or energy required to record a complete account and they have scattered to the far parts of the World and find more important matters to attend to. The ever increasing number of Rooks, present and future, deserve a record of how and where the Rooks originated. From the meager data available and my poor memory, I will summarize the History from 1914 to 1966, when we were required by law to disband this fine organization.

Let us not think of the Rook Founders as being on an immortal pedestal, since this would not be accurate and it would be easy to knock them off if set high above others. Some of the early Rooks are now middle-aged or elderly men, most of whom are decent and fairly successful, no doubt. I will not try to track them down now, but will tell of their personalities as Active Rooks during the start and growth of Grandview Heights, Grandview High School and the Rooks.

The normal desire of most boys to form gangs, and the possession by Joe Bronson of an ancient log cabin, set on the edge of a wooded ravine, and surrounded by groves of trees, was an ideal setting for the formation of a Club. No doubt, counselling by his Lawyer Father led to the forming of a Moral, Christian Fraternity, to be called the Brotherhood of Rooks. Joe Bronson and his bosom pal, Maurice Hendershott, got their heads together and decided to form a Club with the highest ideals for Community Service and for the fun of it. Not being one of the Founders, what I have to say is mostly hearsay. Although Lyman Markel and I were the first two pledges to the Rooks, we did not delve into the reason for the organization but eagerly accepted membership with its responsibilities.

Joe Bronson and Marny Hendershott were fellows that everyone liked and they had lots on the ball! Both were healthy, athletic fellows with ideas to spare, and Joe had a picturesque old cabin which had been moved by his Father from a site near Cambridge and Fifth Avenues that had its own water well. Legend tells of it's having been a hiding place during the Civil War for escaping slaves from the South. It was conveniently located on the rear of the Bronson home on Wyandotte Road South of Bluff. It is still sitting there.

Formation of the Rooks may have been inspired by a club his brother, Hiram, had formed of older boys, known as the GOK's, an abbreviation for 'GOD ONLY KNOWS'. Not being invited to join the GOK's, Joe and Marny thought they should have a club of their own. The GOK's foolishly restricted membership to the Founders only, so it soon fizzled out as members moved elsewhere, graduated from College or lost interest. The Rooks, however, had more fraternal spirit, better objectives and fine leadership on a continuing basis, and a fine cabin ideally set in a wooded area where noisy activities bothered no one.

The cabin was really ancient and built of graying logs with mortar chinking, some of which had fallen out near the windows. It was rectangular in shape and along the longer West side, a battered door had been boarded up, no doubt by some pioneer family long ago. The main entrance was through a door on the South side next to a large stone fireplace built of native granite boulders. Single hinged windows were located in the North and East sides, but the sun rarely entered because of the dense woods. Members frequently entered and left the cabin by way of these windows, for reasons known only to teen-age boys. The cabin had a first and second floor. Near the Northwest corner inside the building a ship-ladder led to a second-floor opening that usually was closed by a trap door. Former occupants may have slept up there or even hidden hunted slaves there but since there was no way to heat the upstairs, it was virtually unused. The floors of both rooms were a trifle shaky, especially when heavily loaded with Rooks and their guests. The first floor was thin and close to the ground and the fireplace did little to heat the entire room during the cold winter days, but radiated a fine feeling of warmth and closeness to the boys crowded around the hearth. Mr. Bronson had added electric drop lights, the only modern addition, and the lights were indispensable to card playing members. Later, the Rooks ran a gas line out from the Bronson home, which was connected to a two-burner hot plate, usually used to heat the cocoa which was the main part of 'eats' served there. The large first floor room was rather dark and dingy with a musty odor from the old upholstered chair and sofa and tracked-in mud. Although all the meager furniture had been cast off and had stuffing coming out in spots, it seemed like heaven to us teen-age boys. A rag rug, old stand the size of a card table, an old library table, several other chairs and a few odds and ends comprised the furniture. When cleaned up by the pledges (skunks), the room was pretty decent.

After the usual meeting before the lighted fireplace, the lights would be turned off and there would be a true brotherly reunion of spirit. Sitting before the fireplace, with some smoking pipes or cigarettes, (which we were not allowed to do at home) with 'Tex' Hill playing the mandolin and 'Rancho' Livingston his guitar, we sang the popular songs of the day or just sat and talked. No subject was taboo, so we talked our hearts out to each other, laughed, kidded and told jokes and stories. Whatever the mood, that fellowship before the cabin fireplace meant more to us than we ever realized. Our every thoughts were on Sports, Athletics, Community Activities and Games, Group telegraph lines, and later of ways to earn funds honestly to build a new Club House, when we were forced to vacate the cabin on the death of Joe Bronson's Father and the sale of their home. Sex was farthest from our thoughts as was Dope and other evils. Rook and Community projects occupied our entire leisure time, with Sports and Music activities next.

From the start, the Brotherhood of Rooks was selective about their members. In my opinion, the first principle of fraternalism is bound up in the right to be selective or exclusive. To permit any who wished to join would result in a membership which spiritually or temperamentally might not be compatible. The Rooks were organized as a Christian, Moral Boys Club which started each meeting with the ritual and prayer:

'AS THE ROOKS OF OLD FLOCK TOGETHER, SO SHALL WE
FLOCK TOGETHER; EACH BROTHER BEING LOYAL TO HIM-
SELF AND TO HIS CLAN. MOST HIGH RAVEN OF ALL, LOOK
DOWN UPON US TONIGHT, WHEREVER WE MAY BE. HELP
US TO LIVE A MORE PURE LIFE, TO UPHOLD RIGHT AND
LIVE DOWN WRONG.' Amen.

The careful deliberation on each new member has resulted in a closely knit brotherhood with common goals, desires and wishes. It was an honor to be invited to become a Rook and their high standards have been maintained until the Supreme Court of Ohio ordered the Club closed, because High School Fraternities are now illegal. The exact date of the Rooks first meeting cannot be found, but it was in 1914, I believe. The Rooks met weekly to enjoy each others companionship and make plans for the next event concerning them. Having the cabin for a meeting place was a good drawing card, although that fireplace seemed to gobble the firewood as fast as the Rooks could gather it and cup up the railroad ties, fallen trees, etc. When we ran low on fuel, we would borrow some from the pile across the ravine belonging to our member George Stones' Father. He bought it already cut and dried by several cords at a time, so a few sticks were never missed.

The Charter members of the Rooks were: Joe Bronson, Al Bradbury, Marny Hendershott, Francis Paddock, Bob Page, and Ellis Rogers. The Principal of Grandview High School, Pearl A. McCarty, and later, I. Stanton Jones, teacher and coach, were Honorary Members, but they rarely participated after their inauguration. After a short time, two new members, Bradley Skeele and Lyman Markel, were added and at frequent intervals thereafter two more members were added. The Rooks gained some status by having the High School Principal as an Honorary Member, and because Bob Page's Father was Mayor of Grandview, and Lyman Markel's Father was President of the School Board when Edison Grade School was built. In a year or two, 17 more members had been added, as follows: Ralph Karns, Julius Stone, Jr., Ed Hill, Stu Constable, John Kenny Landaker, Ed Baker, Bob Livingston, Bill Long, Bern Jaeger, George Stone, Harry Knox, Frame Howell, Ted Eaton, Malcom Anderson, Leroy Henderschott, Bob Rex, and Irving Bradbury. After this, larger groups of pledges were chosen and the membership grew finally to quite a large number, possibly 500 or more, a complete roster not being available to me. An annual meeting with a fine dinner and entertainment afterwards was the custom and a great many of the members attended in tuxedos, making it a formal affair. After the Rooks were disbanded, the house was sold and the interest only used for the Rook-Ted J. Eaton Scholarship. The first year \$300 was given to a deserving Grandview High male student to attend college and in later years, after donations and bequests were added, \$1000 was given. This is intended to continue perpetually since the principal amount is not reduced. Ted Eaton was a tower of strength for the Rooks and was continuously available and active until his death in 1967. He contributed greatly to Rook affairs by his great wisdom, energy, ideas, and sincerely unselfish interest to the continuing growth and prosperity of the Rooks.

In 1920, a great catastrophe struck the Rooks—Joe Bronson's Father died and their home, together with the cabin, was sold. The new owner declined to rent the cabin to the Rooks so they met, first at the home of Bradley Skeele, and later at the home of Ned Thompson. Their parents could stand the noisy enthusiasm of the teen-age Rooks only so long so it looked like the Rooks would have to disband for want of a Club House. It was then that the financial savvy of Ted Eaton and the construction-wise Lyman Markel got their heads together and found that it would be possible to build a new Club House if all the members would work on it. To raise money for the materials and lot, every known method was used. Plays were given, soft drinks were sold at the Field Day, football games and other Community events, and the Rook House Company was incorporated as a non-profit organization under the laws of Ohio, with Lyman Markel as President and Ted Eaton as Secretary-Treasurer. Stock was sold to Rooks parents and others and Mr. George C. Urlin, an influential

member of Grandview, donated money for a lot on Elmwood Avenue that was suitable for a Club House without other improvements. In later years, much of this stock was surrendered free to the Rooks and all debts were properly repaid. The Rooks were held in high esteem in the Community because of their great service and high ideals. The Rooks were careful to avoid any group pranks detrimental to their reputation. At Halloween, groups of boys often would rampage around the neighborhood causing minor displacement of property (like gates, etc.), but they would not consist solely of Rooks and so far as I know, the Rooks were never charged with any misbehaving or improper use of the Club House, which was rented to any responsible group at reasonable charges, when not required for official meetings. The huge living room of the Club House was well built of heavy maple flooring which was well maintained by the Skunks, and was in perfect condition in 1970 when I last viewed it. The House also required a minimum of maintenance over the first 50 years of its life because of its good design and construction by the 'Sweat of their Brows' of the Rooks of that day.

In 1915, there was no Upper Arlington which was later laid out on the Miller farm, North of Fifth Avenue. Grandview was a small village, 30 minutes by street car West of Columbus. In fact, most travel was by street car, with the most obliging Abe Lincoln as a Conductor, who delivered parcels, messages and children to a certain car stop without charge and with a smile. There were less than 400 families living generally in harmony, one church at First and Lincoln Road, clay, cinder or gravel streets with one street light per block. There were many vacant lots, usually wooded, through which a private telegraph line ran from Ted Eaton's home, via Lyman Markel's and Al Bradbury's to Fred Jaeger's on First Avenue. Gradually homes started filling the vacant lots, First Street was paved with macadam, curbs, gutters, water, gas and sewer lines were extended to serve the Village. It was a proud day when a Volunteer Fire Department was located at First and Elmwood Avenues. Most of these people attended the same church, shopped at one of the two groceries, conversed on the 30-minute car ride to and from work in Columbus, and sent their children to the Grandview Heights grade or high school. Boys of that day had plenty of room to play and no gangs or cliques were evident, due partly, no doubt, to the Rooks organization for the older boys and their efforts to get everyone involved in some sport or other at the schools.

How the name Rooks was chosen is a little unclear. It was rumored that Al Bradbury, being a year older than the others, shopped around manufacturing jewelers and saw the 5-sided sterling silver pin with a black bird and the letters B of R thereon, at a reasonable price, so it was adopted as the official emblem—the bird became a Rook and the B of R became Brotherhood of Rooks. The ritual and prayer was then selected to coordinate with the pin characters. Al Bradbury was a principle contributor to the ritual and original organization and did much to give the Rooks a good start and maintained his interest after leaving Grandview High School to attend Ohio State University.

A good deal of early Rook History centers around sports, especially football in the Fall. Most boys having played kid football were eligible for the High School squad. In fact, the first few years of football at GHS was played with only 11 players available. Offensive and defensive teams were not even thought of and during one of the games a regular player was hurt and was replaced by a volunteer chosen from the accompanying rooters. One year we won the game at Grove City. The rivalry was so keen that the local team swore to beat us up in the showers, so our

coach had us to directly from the game to our autos and head for home before a fight could start. In the early years we had half-pint Bob Page, small but spunky, as quarterback. On the line was Lyman Markel, Ed Hill, Harry Knox, Ed Baker, Joe Bronson, Bernard Jaeger, Stu Constable and Ralph Karns. The backfield was comprised of Francis Paddock, Marny Hendershott, Ellis Rogers, Al Bradbury and Bill Long. Bradley Skeele played at center. Our uniforms were anything but uniform, being self bought or borrowed. Our playing field had a ravine across it and a tree stump near the goal line. A neighbor's cow foraged there and had to be chased away when we played. We dressed in the Boys Toilet Room of the Grade School and laid out the field lines with a lime tennis marker before each game. There were no stands to sit in so spectators would crowd along the side lines, and occasionally a smart End would hide himself among the fans so he could get a good start on a forward pass before the Defense would notice him. Our first coach was A. R. Kizer, history and mathematics teacher, and later I. Stanton Jones coached the team. What our team lacked in great plays and skill we made up in enthusiasm and great effort. I believe we won as many games as we lost, and no one was seriously hurt during our game season, in spite of our poor uniform equipment, head gear and shoes unsuitable for the football games.

After games and on week ends we would gather around a big fire in the Cabin fireplace celebrating sometimes with cider and doughnuts. Everyone chipped in so eats were usually available. There were no picture shows or theaters in Grandview then, so the Cabin substituted for our present type of entertainment. Occasionally there were girl parties to attend, but we considered these rather "sissy". At one girl party in the Cabin we served hot cocoa in parafined cups intended for cold drinks. Of course they melted and there was cocoa all over the floor. Poker games were common but the stakes were always very low and a 25 cent loss was considered to be the ultimate limit. Spirited gambling was kept in check by good sense and true fellowship because no one wished to see any member lose very much. Those not wishing to play poker would often sing or play instruments like the mandolin, guitar, ocarina, etc., or tell stories, or discuss the better plays of the game.

For every fall and winter meeting or other gathering in the Cabin a large fire was prepared in the fireplace. So a great deal of effort went into having a warm room and a lot of time was spent on sawing and chopping up logs and railroad ties. This led to lots of kidding among the workers, to see that each one carried their part of the load. One afternoon nicknames for each one was started when Lyman Markel, always a work horse, called attention to Bradley Skeele who was sitting on a log. Lyman said "Look at Do Little Dudley Skeele". That started the nicknames and Lyman became "Lusty Lyman", Joe Bronson was called "Gassy Grinder", Al Bradbury was just "Al", Francis Paddock—"Paddy", Maurice Hendershott—"Musty", Robert Page—"Pagey", Ellis Rogers—"Ellis", Julius Stone, Jr.—"Kid", Ralph Karns—"Weinie", Ed Hill—"Tex" because he wore a sombrero and played cowboy. Stuart Constable was called "Stu", Kenny Landaker—"Jawn" after his real first name, Ed Baker—"Red", Bob Livingston—"Romeo" because he did his best to emulate Will Rogers tricks with lariat, chaps and hat and rolled a cigarette with one hand which is no easy trick. Bill Long was just "Bill", Bernard Jaeger was "Stinkie" for some unknown reason, and George Stone was called "UCH". From that time on each member was given a nickname, appropriate or not, and these names have stuck with them until they died.

When the Rooks was formed most members were freshmen or sophomores of

Grandview High School, as were most of the new members taken in. As we grew older the ideas and activities of the Rooks changed somewhat. The older members became interested in girls, college affairs, sailing on Buckeye Lake, or canoeing on Olentangy River. Ted Eaton, though paralyzed from the waist down, attended every football game or other Community event, sailed his boat and won races at the Lake, drove his auto for his insurance business and pleasure. He could get in and out of his wheelchair without help, and along with everything else he even flew to Hawaii and back. Ted was a real "man" and probably the best educated of the Rooks. First, Paddy started going steady with a village sweetheart, Anna Louise Williams, then others fell into the clutches of the village females. These affairs did not wreck the Rooks and we still had good attendance at our Stag affairs in the Cabin and later the new Club House. Our fraternal bond was strong enough to keep the Brotherhood together.

Late in the first year, a Rook dance was held in the ballroom of Bob Page's home. Having no autos at that time, we walked our dates on cinder or gravel walks to and from the dance to the detriment of the girls' dancing pumps. A victrola and a stack of records provided the music, like "Alexander's Rag Time Band", "Dardenella", and other popular songs of the day. We then danced the precise steps of the one step or dreamy waltz, as taught at a school in Columbus where most of the members attended. The boys were instructed to hold a handkerchief at the ladies backs to prevent getting dirt on their dresses. Lusty Lyman had viewed the dancing lessons as being "sissy", so he carried his Dispatch newspaper route while the other boys were learning to dance. At the first Rook dance several girls offered to teach him but with his large, heavy, awkward feet he would step on his partner's foot, apologize, grin, and try again when his partner was recovered. We often wondered at Lusty's nerve and energy, and the girls' ability to take so much punishment. Years later, many Rooks went with their partners to a Community Dance where the men wore tuxedos and were obliged to give their girls a corsage. These dances were held in the Arlington Country Golf Club Banquet Room and we were happy that we had learned dancing at the Rook parties.

At the Chapel of the First Community Church, a Young Peoples Society of an older group was being formed, and several of the Rooks were invited to attend a meeting looking toward membership. The older group voted to refuse membership to those "young pups" which antagonized the Rooks. At a later meeting of the Young Peoples Society in the Chapel, they had crackers, milk and oysters for refreshments stored during the meeting in the basement chapel kitchen. Several of the Rooks climbed through an unlocked basement window and over the coal pile and swiped their refreshments and took them to the Cabin, much to the chagrin of the Young People. This prank on the society caused more enjoyment than the oysters, most of which were buried a few days later. The milk was drunk and most of the 20 pound tin can of crackers were hid in our secret cache under the floor next to the hearth, and eaten later.

As mentioned earlier, construction of the new Club House could be considered the "Crowning Glory" of the Rooks achievements. In 1919, Lyman Markel was a sophomore engineering student at Ohio State University with several years of experience as a carpenter on buildings and was still an active Rook. He made plans for a Club House according to the required building codes to suit the Rooks, then had the University Architect, Howard Dwight Smith, who had just designed the new

OSU Stadium, check over the design which he approved with a minor change. Lyman then made a careful bill of required materials and estimated the cost, and found that funds were available. The Rooks then organized work teams to excavate the full basement, form the foundation, pour the concrete walls with the help of Ellis Roger's Uncle, Roy Ohnsman, and then build the large fireplace and the building of frame with wood siding. Every bit of work was done by Rooks until the building was completed and painted and concrete walks laid. Art Bogen got his Father's heating firm to donate a fine coal furnace which was installed in the basement next to the full sized pool table that had also been donated. The basement had plenty of head room under the furnace pipes so no one needed to stoop while enjoying indoor sports there. The front porch was built of vertical grained tongue and groove pine boards. The grooves were coated with lead paint when laid and were on a slight slope away from the house. In 1970, 50 years later, it was found that these same flooring boards were still in good condition and not rotted, although exposed to rain, snow and sun with only the roof protecting them. Likewise, the interior was in excellent condition which aided in the sale of the house in 1966, when the Rooks was disbanded by Court Order.

The Brotherhood of Rooks has a record they can be proud of. They earned the respect and admiration of the Community for their great contributions in forming a good influence and guidance to many boys lives and the furtherance of good sportsmanship and Community Projects which might have faltered without their aid. Each year a Memorial Banquet and Meeting are held to award the Rook—Ted Eaton Scholarship to a deserving high school student to attend college, and to renew those strong bonds of brotherhood formed years before.